The Need for Integration of Literacy and Social Studies

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Wilmington College Eliminating social studies from the elementary curriculum is an unintended, yet serious, consequence of NCLB. Studies report that 71% of schools have reduced or eliminated non-tested subjects from the curriculum (Kinniburgh, 2008, p1). Integrated curriculum in the classroom became the policy in the 1980s; the problem is a lot of teachers did not understand what was meant by curriculum integration. The idea behind integration was, if enough good quality children’s literature was introduced based on a theme and through student interaction the students would naturally learn however in the process focus on basic reading skills is lost (Kinniburgh, 2008).

Basic methods of learning include integration, which was focused on the whole language philosophy. The current problems with the integrated teaching methods are that the teachers today are more worried about the letter of the law in meeting state standards in literacy and mathematics that social studies are being cut out of the curriculum almost completely.

“One major misunderstanding of the integrated approach is that some teachers were of the understanding that it is teaching social studies during reading if they simply discuss text that contains the social studies concepts. Social studies instruction should be more than simply discussing main ideas, scanning for information, and making predictions about the text”

(Kinniburgh, 2008, p6). What teachers need to keep in mind is that social studies within the curriculum have certain rules and standards that must be followed. The social studies curriculum cannot just be a book or a passage that includes material that would be considered social studies content.

The other school of thought is the traditional separate subject method of teaching. The biggest problem with this method is that there is not enough time to teach all that is needed to meet all of the state standards. School systems have to pick and choose the most important studies to concentrate on based on their report cards for NCLB. Due to the push for reading and mathematics in standardized testing social studies is being left out of the curriculum.

Teachers and administrators in the school systems need to find a way to incorporate social studies back into the school standards. “Lessons can be created using specific instructional strategies which enable teachers to effectively cover standards in social studies in reading” (Kinniburgh, 2008, p 1).“Education that is organized in such a way that it cuts across subject-matter lines, bringing together various aspects of the curriculum into meaningful associations to focus upon broad areas of study. It views learning and teaching in a holistic way and reflects the real world, which is interactive*”* (Kinniburgh, 2008, p 59). It is possible to include social studies within literacy block of teaching skills.

What is needed to fix this problem is for teachers to start thinking outside the box. The way the integrated curriculum is being taught in the lower grade levels today is not helping students learn what is needed. Instead of teaching social studies in the lower grades as should be done the students are being taught basics of social studies in middle and high school (Hinde 2005). Teaching a test that provides the great grade card for the school system but does not take into consideration what needs to be taught to turn students into proactive citizens in the community. “There is no argument to the Premise that elementary teachers need to ensure that their students learn how to read, however; it is imperative that in the process of teaching reading, teachers do not sacrifice teaching their students the foundations of citizenship, which is the purpose of social studies education” (Hinde, 2005, p1).

Following literacy standards while covering social studies topics following the state standards set down for both can be accomplished. Depending on the grade level topics should be selected that are proper for that grade level while state standards for the social studies and literacy curriculum are followed. “Dedicated teachers who are willing to exert the time, effort, and energy into integrating subject areas will see that the time each day that is to be devoted to literacy, known as the “literacy block,” is the ideal block of time to put curriculum integration into practice” (Kinniburgh, 2008, p 61).

For example if you are covering the Pilgrims landing with a group of third graders you could have the students divide into groups and discuss what they know or think know about the Pilgrims landing (Anticipation Guides). After the discussion have the students form questions based on their discussion. Have the students read the selected passage out loud in class with the teacher assisting where necessary (Group discussion). Once the reading is completed address the questions that the students had previously listed (Grand Conversations). Through class discussion cover each of the questions and finish the lesson by having the students write a comparative list showing what they thought they knew prior to the reading compared to what they know after the reading (Question and Answer Relationships) (Kinniburgh, 2008).

We as teachers need to look past state testing and school system grade cards and reflect upon how and what we were taught in school that got us to where we are today. If we cannot give today’s students at least as good an education as we received then we are failing as teachers.

**Bibliography**

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